

COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

AGENDA TITLE:

Set fees for Returned Check Charges of \$10.00 for each first returned check

and \$25.00 for each subsequent returned check.

MEETING DATE:

September 3, 1997

PREPARED BY:

Finance Director

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the City Council, by resolution, set fees of \$10.00 for each first returned check and \$25.00 for each subsequent returned check, as provided by AB 2643

effective January 1, 1997.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In 1988, a returned check service charge in the amount of \$10.00 was initiated in accordance with Section 1719 of the Civil Code which provided that damages equal to treble the amount of a non-sufficient funds check could

he enforced under specific circumstances. In 1988, 452 checks were returned for non-sufficient funds, referred to maker, or account closed. In the fiscal year 1996/97 a total of 916 checks were returned for a 103% increase in a nine (9) year period. Of that total an average of 51% were at the 90 day delinquent position subject to termination for non-payment of utilities. At that point of delinquency, a \$10.00 late fee is added to the total bill. That group of utility customers avoided immediate turn-off due to non-payment and the \$25.00 late fee that would have occurred on the next bill by submitting a check drawn on non-sufficient funds. Analysis of collection attempts by Finance office staff has determined the cost to collect for a returned check to be \$25.36. Additional effort by field personnel increases the total cost to \$105.26 for each returned check if service is terminated.

On September 27, 1996, Governor Wilson signed into law AB 2643 which became effective January 1, 1997. The new law provides that a check-writer of the dishonored check shall be liable to the "payee" (person named on the check) for a service charge in an amount not to exceed \$25.00 for the first check dishonored, and an amount not to exceed \$35.00 for each subsequent check dishonored. A service charge for a dishonored check is not only intended to recover bank charges passed through to the City of Lodi, but also to discourage this type of behavior.

FUNDING REQUIRED: None

Vicky McAthie, Finance Director

Prepared by: Maxine Cadwallader, Revenue Manager

APPROVED:

H. Dixon Flynn -- City Manager

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BILL TEXT

CHAPTER 1000 FILED WITH SECRETARY OF STATE SEPTEMBER 29, 1996 APPROVED BY GOVERNOR SEPTEMBER 27, 1996 PASSED THE ASSEMBLY AUGUST 30, 1996 PASSED THE SENATE AUGUST 21, 1996 AMENDED IN SENATE AUGUST 20, 1996 AMENDED IN SENATE AUGUST 5, 1996 AMENDED IN SENATE JUNE 17, 1996 AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 18, 1996

INTRODUCED BY Assembly Members Bordonaro and Kaloogian

FEBRUARY 21, 1996

An act to amend Section 1719 of the Civil Code, relating to commercial paper.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2643, Bordonaro. Commercial paper: insufficient funds.

Existing law creates a cause of action for the amount of a check passed on insufficient funds minus any partial payment made within 30 days of a specified written demand for payment, damages equal to treble that amount, as specified, plus the costs of mailing the written demand for payment only if the person who passed the check failed to pay either the amount of the check or the amount of the bad check fee charged to the payer by his or her financial institution within a prescribed period, except as specified.

This bill would revise and recast these provisions to create a cause of action for the amount of the check and a specified service charge, payable to the payee. The bill would provide that the person shall have 30 days from the . date a prescribed written demand was mailed to pay the amount of the check, the service charge, and the cost to mail the demand. If the person fails to pay this amount in full, this person shall instead be liable for specified amounts, including treble damages. The bill would make conforming changes.

The bill would, among other things, provide that for purposes of the above provisions, the term "payee" includes an assignee or holder of the check.

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BILL TEXT

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

- SECTION 1. Section 1719 of the Civil Code is amended to read: 1719. (a) (1) Notwithstanding any penal sanctions that may apply, any person who passes a check on insufficient funds shall be liable to the payee for the amount of the check and a service charge payable to the payee for an amount not to exceed twenty-five dollars (\$25) for the first check passed on insufficient funds and an amount not to exceed thirty-five dollars (\$35) for sach subsequent check to that payee passed on insufficient funds.
- (2) Notwithstanding any penal sanctions that may apply, any person who passes a check on insufficient funds shall be liable to the payee for damages equal to treble the amount of the check if a written demand for payment is mailed by certified mail to the person who had passed a check on insufficient funds and the written demand informs this person of (A) the provisions of this section, (3) the amount of the check, and (C) the amount of the service charge payable to the payee. The person who had passed a check on insufficient funds shall have 30 days from the date the written demand was mailed to pay the amount of the check, the amount of the service charge payable to the payee, and the costs to mail the written demand for payment. If this person fails to pay in full the amount of the check, the service charge payable to the payee, and the costs to mail the written demand within this period, this person shall then be liable instead for the amount of the check, minus any partial payments made toward the amount of the check or the service charge within 30 days of the written demand, and damages equal to treble that amount, which shall not he less than one hundred dollars (\$100) nor more than one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500). When a person becomes liable for treble damages for a check that is the subject of a written demand, that person shall no longer he liable for any service charge for that check and any costs to mail the. written demand,
- (3) Notwithstanding paragraphs (1) and (2), a person shall not be liable for the service charge, costs to mail the written demand, or treble damages if he or she stops payment in order to resolve a good faith dispute with the payee. The payee is entitled to the service charge, costs to mail the written demand, or treble damages only upon proving by clear and convincing evidence that there was no good faith dispute, as defined in subdivision (b).
- (4) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), a person shall not be liable under that paragraph for the service charge if, at any time, he or she presents the payee with written confirmation by his or her financial institution that the check was returned to the payee by the financial institution due to an error on the part of the financial institution.
- (5) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), a person shall not be liable under that peregraph for the service charge if the person presents the payer with written

To:

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confirmation that his or her account had insufficient funds as a result of a delay in the regularly scheduled transfer of, or the posting of, a direct deposit of a social security or government benefit assistance payment.

- (5) As used in this subdivision, to "pass a check on insufficient funds" means to make, utter, draw, or deliver any check, draft, or order for the payment of money upon any bank, depository, person, firm, or corporation that refuses to honor the check, draft, or order for any of the following reasons:
 - (A) Lack of funds or credit in the account to pay the check.
- (B) The person who wrote the check does not have an account with the
- (C) The person who wrote the check instructed the drawee to stop payment on the check.
- (b) For purposes of this section, in the case of a stop payment, the existence of a "good faith dispute" shall be determined by the trier of fact. A "good faith dispute" is one in which the court finds that the drawer had a reasonable belief of his or her legal entitlement to withhold payment. Grounds for the entitlement include, but are not limited to, the following: services were not rendered, goods were not delivered, goods or services purchased are faulty, not as promised, or otherwise unsatisfactory, or there was an overcharge.
- (c) In the case of a stop payment, the notice to the drawer required by this section shall be in substantially the following form:

NOTICE

	(name of drawer)	
		is the payee of a check you wrote
	(name of payee).	
for	\$	The check was not paid because
	. (amount)	
уоц	stopped payment, and th	e payee demands payment. You may
have	a good faith dispute a	as to whether you owe the full amount.
		faith dispute with the payee and fail
		amount of the check in cash, a service
char	ge of an amount not to	exceed twenty-five dollars (\$25) for
the	first check bassed on i	insufficient funds and an emount not to

- and held responsible to pay at least both of the following: (1) The amount of the check.
- (2) Damages of at least one hundred dollars (\$100) or, if higher, three times the amount of the check up to one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500).

exceed thirty-five dollars (\$35) for each subsequent check passed on insufficient funds, and the costs to mail this notice within 30 days after this notice was mailed, you could be sued

If the court determines that you do have a good faith dispute with the payee, you will not have to pay the service charge, treble damages, or mailing cost.

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If you stopped payment because you have a good faith dispute with the payee, you should try to work out your dispute with the payee. You can contact the payee at:

(name of payee)	
 (street address)	
 (telephone number)	·····

You may wish to contact a lawyer to discuss your legal rights and responsibilities.

(name of sender of notice)

- (d) In the case of a stop payment, a court may not award damages or costs under this section unless the court receives into evidence a copy of the written demand which, in that case, shall have been sent to the drawer and a signed certified mail receipt showing delivery, or attempted delivery if refused, of the written demand to the drawer's last known address.
- (e) A cause of action under this section may be brought in small claims court by the original payee, if it does not exceed the jurisdiction of that court, or in any other appropriate court. The payee shall, in order to recover damages because the drawer instructed the drawee to stop payment, show to the satisfaction of the trier of fact that there was a reasonable effort on the part of the payee to reconcile and resolve the dispute prior to pursuing the dispute through the courts.
- (f) A cause of action under this section may be brought in municipal court by a holder of the check or an assignee of the payee. However, if the assignee is acting on behalf of the payee, for a flat fee or a percentage fee, the assignee may not charge the payee a greater flat fee or percentage fee for that portion of the amount collected that represents treble damages than is charged the payee for collecting the face amount of the check, draft, or order. This subdivision shall not apply to an action brought in small claims
- (q) Notwithstanding subdivision (a), if the payee is a municipal court, the written demand for payment described in subdivision (a) may be mailed to the drawer by a municipal court clerk. Notwithstanding subdivision (d), in the case of a stop payment where the demand is mailed by a municipal court clerk, a court may not award damages or costs pursuant to subdivision (d), unless tha court receives into evidence a copy of the written demand, and a certificate of mailing by a municipal court clerk in the form provided for in subdivision (4) of Section 1013a of the Code of Civil Procedure for service in civil actions. For purposes of this subdivision, in courts where a single court clerk serves more than one court, the clerk shall be deemed the court clerk of each court.
- (h) The requirements of this section in regard to remedies are mandatory upon a court.
- (i) The assignee of the payer or a holder of the check may demand, recover, or enforce the service charge, damages, and costs specified in this section to

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the same extent as the original payee.

CR STOCKTON

- (j) (1) A drawer is liable for damages and costs only if all of the requirements of this section have been satisfied.
- = / (2) The drawer shall in no event be liable more than once under this section on each check for a service charge, damages, or costs.
 - (k) Nothing in this section is intended to condition, curtail, or otherwise prejudice the rights, claims, remedies, and defenses under Division 3 . (commencing with Section 3101) of the Commercial Code of a drawer, payee, assignee, or holder, including a holder in due course as defined in Section 3302 of the Commercial Code, in connection with the enforcement of this section.

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BAD CHECK CHARGE

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By Ron Sargis, CAC Legal Counsel

Un September 27, 1996, Governor Wilson signed into law AB 2643 which created an automatic statutory merchant bad check service charge. This new law brings to a close the attacks made by debtors on bad check service charges and the folklore which was created around recent cases. Although the courts which reviewed this issue have held that there exists two independent legal theories for the bad check service charge under current law. contract and Commercial Code theories, this legislation puts to an end the dispute being created by a very small group of debtors who seek to avoid paying a merchant bad check service charge for their dishonored check.

This legislation, which was spearheaded by the California Retailers Association amends the current treble damage statute so as to make a merchant bad check service charge an integral part of the process. This law becomes effective January 1, 1997. At this time, I think it appropriate to review these new provisions and how the new law should be applied.

Paragraph (a)(1) of Civil Code Section 1719 creates the right to bad check service charge upon dishonor of the check. The dishonor of the check may be due to lack of funds or credit to pay the check, a closure or nonexistence of account, or a stop payment where there is not a good faith dispute. These grounds and dishonors are the same as under current law.

The new law provides that a check-writer of the dishonored check shall be liable to the "payee" (person named on the check) for a service charge in an amount not to exceed \$25.00 for the first check dishonored, and an amount not to exceed \$35.00 for each subsequent check dishonored. First, with respect to the "amount not to exceed \$25.00," various merchants had different opinions as to the bad check service charge that was appropriate for their establishment, so it is left to the merchant to set the amount charged for a dishonored check. The \$35.00 amount for the second and subsequent dishonored-checks by the check-writer to the merchant was in part based upon the fact that the actual cost of handling a dishonored check exceeded \$25.00 as documented by the data assembled by the Retailers Association. Therefore, for the situation where a check-writer issues multiple dishonored checks to a merchant, there was very little sympathy shown for him or her with respect to the bad check charge.

Paragraph (a)(2) of Civil Code Section 1719 will now be the treble damage paragraph. It provides that a check-writer of a dishonored check shall be liable for an amount equal to treble the amount of the check if a written demand for payment is mailed by certified mail to the check-writer, and the notice informs the check-writer of (A) the provisions of Civil Code Section 1719, (B) the amount of the check, and (C) the amount of the service charge payable to the payee. If the check-writer does not pay the amount of the check, the amount of the service charge, and the cost of mailing

this written demand within 30 days from the date it was mailed, then the check-writer shall be liable for the amount of the check, minus any partial payments made toward the check or the service charge within 30 days of the demand, and damages equal to treble that amount. The treble damages shall continue to not be less than \$100.00 nor more than \$1,500.00.

AB 2643 adds new paragraphs (4) and (5) to Civil Code Section 1719(a). These paragraphs provide that the check-writer is not liable for the \$25.00/ \$35.00 service charge if he or she presents the payee with written confirmation from the financial institution that the check was returned and due to an error on the part of the financial institution itself. Additionally, the check-writer is not liable for the \$25,00/\$35.00 service charge if he/she presents the payee with written confirmation that the dishonor occurred because of a delay in the regularly scheduled transfer of, or the posting of, a direct deposit social security or government benefit assistance payment. These two very explicit exceptions were carved out of the general automatic liability for the bad check service charge, and the burden is on the check-writer to produce the documentation. Please also note that these exceptions were only for the bad check service charge, and check-writer will remain liable for the treble damages if they fail to pay within the 30-day notice period the face amount and the cost of mailing the written demand.

Paragraph (c) of Section 1719 contains the amended statutory notice

(Continued)

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form to be used in the stop payment cases. This also provides a good form for you to check your standard NSF treble damage notice form against as part of your periodic form review,

Paragraph (e) of Section 1719 was clarified to provide that a small claims court action may be brought by the original payee (merchant) on the dishonored check if it does not exceed the jurisdictional limits of that court. The reference to "original payee" was added at the request of the Attorney General's office to avoid any confusion that this paragraph would have created jurisdiction for assignees in small claims court.

Paragraph (f) of Civil Code
Section 1719 was amended to state that
not only the assignce, but also the
"holder of the check" could bring an
action in municipal court for a negotiated check. This clarification was
requested by the bankers. The holder in
due course is a specifically defined
person under the Commercial Code and
is different from an assignce.

Paragraph (h) of Civil Code
Section 1719 continues to state that the remedies set forth in this section are mandatory upon the court. This provision is in current law and was put into statute to codify (make part of a statute rather than just in a court decision) the District Court of Appeal decision directing that the trial court cannot have any discretion in either wording or the amount of the treble damages.

New paragraph (i) of Civil Code Section 1719 expressly states that the assignee of the original payee or holder of the check may demand, recover or enforce the service charge, damages and costs to the same extent as the original payee. This provision makes it clear that the assignee and holder can exercise all rights that the original payee would have, expressly including the right to demand and recover, as well as enforce through a court action, the various remedies.

New paragraph (j) of Civil Code Section 1719 was added to state that the theck-writer is liable for the treble damages and cost if the payee/assignce/ holder comply with all the requirements of Civil Code Section 1719. For the bad check service charge, it means that the check has been dishonored. For the treble damages, it means that the proper notice was sent by certified mail, and the 30 days expired. This section further states that in no event shall the checkwriter be liable for more than one service charge, treble damages or cost for each check. This was to avoid a situation where an original payee and a subsequent holder assignee were both demanding or intending to recover the treble damages for a check period for collection agencies. Your check assignment contract should clearly provide that the check, including all rights and any additional damages, services charges, etc., are covered by the assignment. This section also expressly states that the service charge and subsequent treble damages are owed for each check.

(Continued)

New paregraph (k) of Civil Code
Section 1719 was added to make it clear
that the provisions for the bad check
service charge and treble damages does
not prejudice the rights, claims, remedies, and defenses of any of the
partners as provided in California law in
connection with enforcing payment of a
check. This section expressly provides
that the provisions of Civil Code
Section 1719 do not amend or override
-the general law of negotiable instruments, Division 3 of the California

Commercial Code, for the enforcement of negotiable instruments, which includes checks.

The passage of AB 2643 represents a successful simplification of existing law to allow businesses to easily allocate the cost of bad checks to the person writing such checks. During the legislative process, input from the consumer community was solicited and specific amendments made to the bill to address consumer concerns. In adopting this legislation, the Legislature has

determined that any check service charge up to \$25.00 for the first dishonored check is <u>per se</u> reasonable. Further, the Legislature has also recognized that people who pass multiple bad checks to a creditor are causing an even greater economic burden to the business community, and a higher bad check service charge of \$35.00 (which is closer to the actual cost to the merchant for a dishonored check) is reasonable.

This Bill has also included the requirement that the check-writer pay the bad check service charge in order to avoid the treble damage liability. As long recognized by the Legislature, bad checks represent a significant economic burden on the business community. This occurs whether the check was dishonored through inadvertence or through an intentional act of the check-writer. The inadvertent check-writer may promptly resolve the matter by paying the amount of the check and the check service charge. However, the check-writer who attempts to avoid paying the bad check service charge as authorized under this section, will now face the liability for treble damages upon expiration of the 30-day notice. The days of writing a bad check and getting 60 days of float time for making good with the merchant or collection agency are done, and in all cases, the check-writer of a dishonored check will pay at least the bad check service charge.

If you are either collecting checks or intend to get into the business, please make sure you review these new provisions carefully with your attorney. Then make sure that you and the merchant clients clearly understand the bad check service charge that the merchant wants to recover from the check-writer. Make sure that all of your collectors understand the basis of the bad check service charge under Civil Code Section 1719, that it has been assigned over to the collection agency from the merchant, and the collection agency is now exercising all rights and remedies to demand, recover or enforce the service charge, damages and costs to the same extent as the merchant.

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Consider these important improvements, and you can see how your suggestions and ideas are being implemented at TRW to help you make better credit-granting decisions.

TRW Information Services Division 505 City Parkway West Suite 800 Orange, California 92668 1,800,854,7201

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TRW Consumer Credit Services



Returned Check Cost

8/4/97

	Time	Cost	FINANCE - SUPPORT SERVICES	Time	Cost	
FINANCE - REVENUE			Activity Working with bank copy of returned check,			
Senior Account Clerk			access utility history to verify debit			
Activity			hand write 3 x 5 card documenting returned check			
			Total each check	5 minutes	\$1.45	
Write account # , name of issuer			Enter to mail/merge document,	•		
on bank slip for identification			date, account #, Name of issuer,			
add \$10.00 to check amount	•		addess, service address, \$ amount of check			
access computer for date credited			returned check service charge, due date			
Total each check	5 minutes	\$1.20	stuff letter			
Access returned check register			Total each check	3 minutes	\$0.87	
enter account #, date received at bank						
check #, name of issuer, \$ amount of check			Look up telephone number and call			
date entered into our books			repeat customer, discuss method			
Fund numbers, comments			of payment and due date			
Run computer list for Revenue Manager			Total each check	5 minutes	\$1.45	
Total each check	5 minutes	\$1.20	Access delinquent card file, staple			
			returned check card to any existing			
Prepare entries to computer to reverse credits			delinquent card to avoid duplication	0	40.07	
Prepare window receipt to reverse entries to books Total each check	3 minutes	¢ስ 70	Total each check Sub Total	3 minutes	\$0.87	
Total each check	5 minutes	ψU.72	Sub Total Office Staff		\$4.64	
			Sub Total Office Staff		\$25.36	
			FINANCE - FIELD SERVICES (if check is of redeem	ed by due da	ite)	
Make photocopies of check written to other			Review 3 x 5 card, enter date 48 hour notice			
departments - non utility			issued, amount due & due date.			
Prepare and send letter on current utility accounts			Write up 48 hour notice			
Total each check	5 minutes	\$1.20	Total each check	5 minutes	\$1.30	
			Physical delivery of 48 hour notice			
Verify entries on cash report			Total each check	15 minute	\$3.90	
Verify account #, \$ amt, edit to window receipt		•	If not paid and to ready for turn off, requires physical			

Returned Check Cost

	Total each check	.5 minutes	\$1.20	movement around office to acce			
Prepare total monthlly list of return forward to accounting for month er to reverse entries to various funds	nd JV and object codes			in computer and combined cash guarantee, mark stree card indic make 2 photocopies of seal card one for electric utility staff and d	cating shut off, d, one for office staff,		
	Total list	1 minute	\$0.24	utility office.	-		** **
				Discript short ff (Total each check	30 minute	\$9.60
				Physical shut off (requires 2 per	sons)		40.00
Redeem returned check for custor				Customer Service Supervisor	,	25 minute	\$8.00
Access and update returned check	c register			Accounts Col ector		25 minute	\$6.50
Update utility account				If y and Division to The con-			
Write window receipt to record			:	If paid, Physical Turn on	~~		40.50
returned check charge revenue	mer a di dicina	0	40.00	0 1 1 1 0 1 0 0 0 0 1	Total each check	25 minute	\$6.50
	Total each check	3 minutes	\$0.66	Continual Shut Off Situation			
				Data entry and update list to include Issuer name, address,			
FINANCE - ACCOUNTING				account #, \$ amount, meter info	rmation and		
Account Clerk				comments.			
Activity			1		Total each check	5 minutes	\$1.30
Prepare JV to record month end re							
•	Total list	45 minute	\$9.90	Physical cite visit to determine if	service is still		
				sealed or customer moved			
Check bank statement for returned	checks				Total each check	25 minute	\$6.50
to record returned check charges			i				
,	Total bank statement	20 minute	\$4.40	Continual maintenance of shut of			
				determine credit and require deposit in future			
Sub Total column			\$20.72		Total each check	5 minutes	\$1.30
				Loss if assigned for collection			
					Total each check		\$5.00
				Sub total column			\$84.54
•				on Marine (tea	,		
				Grand Total			\$105.26

RESOLUTION NO. 97-135

A RESOLUTION OF THE LODI CITY COUNCIL SETTING FEES FOR CHECKS RETURNED FOR NON-SUFFICIENT FUNDS, ACCOUNT CLOSED AND REFERRED TO MAKER

WHEREAS, Section 1719 of the Civil Code provides that damages equal to treble the amount of a insufficient funds check could be enforced under specific circumstances; and

WHEREAS, returned checks made payable to the City of Lodi have increased over 100% in a nine (9) year period; and

WHEREAS, delinquent customers submitting checks drawn with non-sufficient funds average 51% of the total checks returned; and

WHEREAS, an analysis of cost incurred by office staff in an attempt to collect exceed \$25.00 for each check, and the total cost at over \$100.00 if field personnel are necessary to force collection; and

WHEREAS, on September 27, 1996, Governor Wilson signed into law AB 2643, effective January 1, 1997, which provides that a check-writer of the dishonored check shall be liable to the "payee" (person named on the check) for a service charge in an amount not to exceed \$25.00 for the first check dishonored, and an amount not to exceed \$35.00 for each subsequent checks dishonored.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Lodi City Council hereby sets the fee for a check returned for non-sufficient funds, account closed, and referred to maker at \$10.00 for the first check dishonored and \$25.00 for each subsequent check dishonored.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED by the Lodi City Council that this Resolution become effective immediately.

Dated: September 3, 1997

I hereby certify that Resolution No. 97-135 was passed and adopted by the City Council of the City of Lodi in a regular meeting held September 3, 1997, by the following vote:

Ayes:

Council Members -

Noes:

Council Members -

Absent:

Council Members -

Abstain:

Council Members -

ALICE M. REIMCHE City Clerk